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ABSTRACT

Historical knowledge is valuable to the adult educator, student, practitioner, or researcher in three different ways. There is philosophical justification for knowing history. There is a cognitive dimension to its value. There is a pragmatic reason for knowing history. A philosophical justification is that knowledge of history contributes to one's liberal education, that is, the education of a free citizen. Cognitive dimensions of history include understanding contemporary adult education concerns and learning about the way understanding is developed. History has pragmatic value in helping the historically informed benefit from the broader human experience and understand trends. (YLB)

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History: Its Place in the Study of Adult Education

Huey B. LOng

History is included in some way in most graduate programs of adult education in the United States. Along with sociology, social psychology and psychology, history was included as one of the important social sciences discussed in the American classic, Adult Education: Outlines of an Emerging Field of University Study (Jensen, Liveright and Hallenbeck, 1964). Yet, the value of history and an historical perspective continues to require justification in some circles.

There are some individuals who remain to be convinced that study of the history of adult education has any specific value. Quite likely the same people have a similar attitude concerning history in general. This attitude is illustrated by a recent exchange of correspondence with a prominent publisher of adult education books who stated that adult educators are not interested in history. Individuals who are not interested in history often take the position that history is past in both a literal and figurative sense. According to this view, what has happened has happened and interest is limited to the immediate time period. Often individuals who are not interested in history are busy people deeply involved in application concerns. Philosophical, theoretical and historical matters are perceived to be abstractions that have limited concrete value in their day-to-day activities. Naturally, such a view is inconsistent with the opinions of historically minded individuals, who, by the way, are

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more numerous among adult educators than is sometimes perceived. We are of a different persuasion and seek to convince the unconvinced and persuade the unpersuaded that our view should prevail.

While this paper is not designed to be an historical examination of why history seems to receive only grudging reluctant recognition among American adult educators, such an effort is recommended for the future. As Cebik (1978) observes in his work, this paper may be more philosophical than historical. Historical understanding is the centerpiece of the essay, but we are in agreement with Cebik's extension of Russell's (1957) comment "there are things to be learnt from history, but I think we must add that not all of them are historical" (Cebik, 1974, p. 11).

Casting the problem in the interogative form, we are concerned with the question, why should history be included in the study of adult education? Whipple (1964) attempted an answer to a similar question more than twenty years ago when he attempted to convince adult educators of the uses of history in adult education. Despite his cogent and articulate reasoning, some seem to remain unconvinced. Whipple made some of the same points that will be explicated here. Repetition seems to be justified, however. He identified three ways in which history may serve the field of adult education. They are as follows:

1. It (history) supplies knowledge and understanding about the past. It extends the individual's experience and thereby permits him to live a richer life and to act more intelligently.

2. There is historical research related to adult education as a contribution to knowledge.
3. Another purpose may be to provide the adult educator with a useful supplementary discipline or tool which can help him become more effective in exercising his responsibilities. (Whipple, 1964, p. 202)

Thus, Whipple has started us on the way to answering the question of why students of adult education should be aware of history. Historical knowledge is valuable to the adult educator, student, practitioner or academic, in three different ways. There is philosophical justification for knowing history. There is a cognitive dimension to its value. There is a pragmatic reason for knowing history.

Philosophical Justifications

Subjects like history, literature, language, pure mathematics and science constitute a traditional liberal education (Livingston, 1945). In its original use, liberal meant "belonging to a free man." In a society where people were either free or slaves, the idea was more powerful than it is today. Liberal education, including the study of history, was, thus, education that was suited to a free citizen.

Despite the change in the social structure from one where free citizens were in the minority to one where there is no legalized slavery, the ideal education for the free person remains a powerful concept. The study of history by the adult educator is based on a philosophical view of humankind. The free citizen today, also, to be a complete person, must be more than a

breadwinner. The free citizen, even the adult educator, must posses something other than the knowledge required to hew wood and haul water in the occupational sense.

Livingston (1945) eloquently communicates the idea of liberal education as follows:

> . . . what is a complete human being? . . .
> Human beings have bodies, minds and characters. Each . . . is capable of . . . "viture" (apetn) or . . . excelllence. The viture or excellence of body is health and fitness and strength, the firm and sensitive hand, the clear eye; the excellence of the mind is to know and to understand and to think, to have some idea of what the world is and of what man has done and has been and can be; the excellence of the character lies in the great vitures. This trinity of body, mind, and character is man: man's aim, besides earning his living, is to make the most of all three . . .
> (p. 61-62).

Basil H. L. Hart (1971) specifically comments on the philosophical value of history. Citing Burckhardt, he said: "our deeper hope from experience is that it (history) should make us, not shrewder (for next time), but wiser (forever)" (p. 12). According to Hart, history teaches us a personal philosophy.

History contributes a philosophical perspective to current events. More than two thousand years ago, Polybius (cited by

Hart) began his History with the remark that the most instructive, indeed the only method of learning to bear with dignity the vicissitude of fortune, is to recall the catastrophies of others. History is a good way of knowing of how things usually go wrong (Hart, 1971). Thus, a long view of history helps us to stay calm in times of difficulty and also reminds us that there is an end to even the longest tunnel. Even when no good hope in the future is discernible, knowledge of history is a help in continuing onward. Hart observes, "for a thinking man, it can be the strongest check on a suicidal feeling." (1971, p. 12).

Philosophers have addressed numerous aspects of history including the process of historical analysis and interpretation. They are not in total agreement as to the nature of historical knowledge and explanation (Gardiner, 1959). Space does not permit a critique of the various philosophies here, therefore, I have elected to emphasize those positions, such as Hart's, I support.

The object of history is to find out what happened while attempting to discover why it happened. Consequently, history has limitations as a guiding signpost. It can sometimes point to the right direction, but it seldom gives detailed information about road conditions. As such, it is more a compass than a road map. However, history may have more value in a negative sense. It can sometimes show us what to avoid even if it does not teach us what to do. Negative instruction can be discerned in history when it reveals the most common mistakes that we are apt to make and to repeat. More will be said on the pragmatic uses of history in a later section.

Cognitive Value

A second value of historical knowledge is derived from its cognitive importance. This desirable attribute of history is suggested and implied in the philosophical justifications discussed earlier. Yet, it is of sufficient importance to discuss further. What is meant by history having a cognitive value? There are at least two parts to the answer. One relates to understanding contemporary adult education concerns. The other aspects concerns the way by which current events are understood in general. This second aspect also affirms the value of history to any well educated person. These two parts of the answer are discussed in the above order.

Understanding

Historical perspectives contribute to our understanding of current events. Simply stated, we tend to relate a current activity or trend with its past, or we fail to recognize the association between what we call the new with the old. With the former we are aware of continuities; the latter emphasizes discontinuities. Stated differently, a sense of history helps one to understand the relations of ideas across time. I shall try to illustrate the point.

Not long ago, a noted writer of adult education materials, (Cross, 1981, p. 169) suggested Shakespeare demonstrated his usual prescience in his description of the ages of man. You will recall Shakespeare poetically described seven ages of the human male's life from infancy to death, from "mewling and puking" infant (Harrison, 1952, p. 790) to one who is "sans teeth, sans taste,

sans everything." (Harrison, 1952, p. 790) Cross (1981) suggested Shakespeare's description was based on some kind of foresight concerning the discovery of life stage development in the twentieth century. Of course, the student of history and literature recognizes the error of the contemporary writer's assumption. The divisions of life identified by Shakespeare were not the result of prescience or even the whispering of the muse. He was merely describing the commonly recognized ages of the human male in Great Britain during his own lifetime. (Anania, 1969/70) The student of history, thus, realizes that the idea of dividing adult life into stages is not a discontinuous event or discovery that lay unknown until the current interest in the topic emerged.

Yet, another illustration is also possible. Just a short time ago, another highly respected administrator, writer and speaker on adult and continuing education indicated that a profit oriented competition among providers of adult education programs primarily is a modern development. How wrong can we be in the face of historical knowledge? The evidence is completely clear that providers of educational programs for adults in the United States have been competitive for some time. Competition includes cutting prices below the charges of others, making promises that cannot be kept and offering instruction in areas where teachers lack the necessary qualifications. My work (Long, 1975) indicates competition of the sort noted above existed among the teachers of adults in the eighteenth century. There is also an indication that adult educators of the 1930's were also concerned about the matter. Thus, to suggest that continuing education programmers in

the 1970's were encountering a new situation also suggests a misreading of the history on this point!

The above illustrations show how current topics of concern, life stage development and profiteering in adult education, were identified only within a context of a few years. Both illustrations reveal how knowledge of ages past, even centuries, sheds light on current topics. They also demonstrate how the discontinuous separation of events over time contribute to misunderstanding and to the making of inaccurate comments.

A second kind of error is also caused by lack of historical understanding. This kind of error is best described as an error of ignorance. Ignorance is used here in a descriptive manner, not as a prejorative. We are all ignorant of some things; some are ignorant of more and some of less. This point is aptly illustrated by another example. A highly respected consultant and prominent adult educator recently wrote that Benjamin Franklin's Junto was composed of the intellectual elite of Philadelphia. What say you? How the laboring tradesmen (Van Doren, 1938) of Franklin's Junto came to be an intellectual elite is difficult to understand. Such a revision of history is paralleled only by the fable of George Washington and the cherry tree.

Another general error perpetuated, in part by professors of adult education, is the idea that Franklin's Junto was a wholly original thing. Van Doren (1938) and others (Grattan, 1955; Long, (1984) have linked Franklin's ideas on this topic to Cotton Mather's Boston neighborhood clubs. Mather's clubs existed in

Boston prior to Franklin's birth and probably were yet in existence during his childhood days in that city.

But let us not restrict our thinking to negative examples associated with ignorance of history. Some positive examples underscore the importance of historical comprehension even better than the negative illustrations. One of the most useful generalizations I discovered in adult education literature was drawn from Robert Peers (1958). He observed that adult education expands most rapidly during times of rapid change.

Another generalization of a different kind is offered by Knowles in The Adult Education Movement in the United States (1977). You may remember he suggested six genetic principles:

1. The institutions of adult education typically emerge in response to specific needs, rather than as part of a general design for the continuing educator of youth.
2. The development process of adult education tends to be more episodic than consistent.
3. Institutional forms for the education of adults tend to survive to the extent that they become attached to agencies established for other purposes.
4. Adult education programs tend to emerge with secondary status in the institutional hierarchy.
5. Adult education programs tend to gain stability and permanence as they become increasingly differentiated in administration, finance curriculum, and methodology.
6. The institutional segments of the adult educational field tend to conceptualize into organized substructures without reference to any conception of a general adult

educational movement (p. 257-260).

Based on my own study of adult education in the United States, I have identified five general purposes of adult education:

Americanization education

Education for occupational purposes

Education for personal liberation

Education for social liberation

Literacy education

Collectively, these three generalizations derived by different individuals provide a pretty good basis for examining contemporary developments in adult education. Of course, additional study in each of these areas is possible. Integration and synthesis of these generalizations will be facilitated by application of the historian's question of why is this?

Adult education in the United States has not been the subject of numerous distinguished historians as is true in the United Kingdom. Our history frequently is more descriptive than explanatory; it is often an account of what existed before rather than a reasoned analysis of why things were as they were. As a result, we continue to search for answers to significant questions. For example, why is research in adult education often atheoretical? Is there an historical explanation for the nature of research? Another example concerns the parallel streams of learning theory. How does one explain the coexistance of Skinner, Rogers and Knowles in discussions of learning theory? Yet, a third question involves the relationship between varying emphases

on the group and the individual according to different periods in recent history.

Method of Understanding

A second dimension of the cognitive value of knowing history concerns the way understanding is developed. What is meant by this is the historians' way of knowing. It is the application of the historians' skills and methods to the testing of knowledge. Following Hart (1971), it is suggested the first response to a criticism of anything in which one has an interest is, "is it true?" History as a discipline encourages the development of such an attitude that places concern for the truth above questions of fairness or consequences. The study of history also instills a certain skepticism. Establishing the credibility of sources, recognizing the difficulties in establishing cause and effect and similar skills of the historian are also desirable for adult educators.

Henry St. John, Viscount Bolingbroke (1970) illustrates this point well by referring to John Locke's argument favoring the study of geometry. He says:

> Mr. Lock, I think, recommends the study of geometry even to those who have no designs of being geometricians: and he gives a reason for it, that may be applied to the present case. Such persons may forget every problem that has been proposed, and every solution that they or others have given; but the habit of pursuing long

> trains of ideas will remain with them, and they will pierce through the mazes of sophism and discover a latent truth, where persons who have not this habit will never find it (p. 61-67).

So, St. John suggests the study of history prepares the individual for action and observation. He describes history as an ancient author and experience as the modern language. Through the interaction and use of both, St. John says "we become better able to judge of the things that are" (1970, p. 67).

Pragmatic Value

It has been shown that knowledge of history is valuable to the adult educator because it has a philosophical significance and because it is valuable in a cognitive sense. But, you say, "I'm a hard headed realist. I deal with the bottom line every day. The philosophical and cognitive justifications are okay for men and women of leisure, but I need a more pragmatic justification for knowing history." Two kinds of pragmatic value recommend a knowledge of history to the adult educator. One is a broader experience. The other is an aid in understanding trends.

Experience

Someone has said something like this: a wise person learns from the experience of others, a smart person learns from personal experience and a fool learns from neither. According to Hart (1971) Bismarck said, "Fools say they learn by experience. I prefer to profit by other people's experience." (p. 15)

Regardless of the phasing of the above two bits of wisdom, it is clear that it is best to learn from the experiences of others. History offers an opportunity for that kind of learning in the widest possible measure. It is universal experience, longer, wider and more varied than any one person's experience. It is said "There is no excuse for anyone who is not illiterate if he is less than three thousand years old in mind" (Hart, 1971, p. 16). Polybius observed that mankind has two roads for reformation -one through personal misfortune, the other through misfortune of others. The former is the most vivid, the latter is the less painful. Thus, adult educators have a choice of the kinds of experience from which they will learn. To choose history as a way of gaining valued insights from the experiences of many others is a practical choice and should appeal to the most pragmatically inclined individual except for those who wish to limit their learning to their own provincial experience. Remember, Bismarck had a name for such people!

The pragmatic value of historical experience emerges from two discrete areas. First, a sense of history helps in the development of principles that extend beyond mere impressions of current "facts." Second, it rewards practice by suggesting what has worked, or not worked, in practice before, why it did or did not work and options or alternatives for consideration.

Understanding Trends

Another pragmatic value of history is derived from its usefulness in understanding trends, or at least being aware of them. There are at least two potential responses to new trends:

(a) a kind of super enthusiastic acceptance or rejection of a new trend; or (b) a moderate position concerning it. People without a sense of history are more apt to be associated with the first kind of responses. Trends are viewed in an historically detached manner and are not associated with the past; such a view is a discontinuous interpretation, as noted in section two of this paper. As a result, the trend is the object of intense feeling, either acceptance or rejection. The extremes are reflected in attitudes concerning the topic.

Individuals with a better sense of history are likely to be more moderate in their response. They recognize the trends. In most cases, it is not necessarily something completely new and novel. They recognize its past in the present form. Of course, it is possible that such knowledge may deepen one's concern as they perceive an expansion or deepening of some vulgar or evil obscenity. Even Jesus became agitated by the merchants in the temple. But, the historically minded, whose rejection of a trend on sound historical knowledge of its danger are, as noted earlier, encouraged to seek the light at the end of the tunnel of despair.

The value of history in assessing trends is illustrated below: How is one to respond to the increasing prominence of occupationally focused adult education? This question is a real one as liberal adult education and adult education for social change seem to be losing their appeal. While I shall not attempt to answer the question here, it is important to note that adult education in the U.S. traditionally has been characterized as pragmatic (Long, 1982). Since the eighteenth century, American adults have engaged in learning for a number of reasons;

occupational reasons have always been important. Our situation is different from that of Germany and Great Britain where liberal adult education appears to have much stronger historical roots. The point to be made is, yes, liberal education and adult education for social change seems to be less important than occupational adult education, but it may have been so for years. If the current situation is merely an extension of the past, an appropriate response is different from the response in a nation where the change is a radical one. In other words, the former situation does not necessarily imply significant changes in philosophy, structure or nature of provision. In the latter situation, there may be significant changes that must be accounted for in order to grasp the meaning of the change.

Summary

Knowledge of history in general and history of adult education in particular has value. This article has discussed some of the justifications for increasing one's historical knowledge, which are answers to the question, why study history?

Three ways in which history may serve adult education, as shared by Whipple (1964) were reported. Then three major justifications and value of history of adult education were discussed. The three main topics were (a) philosophical justification, (b) cognitive value and (c) pragmatic reasons for knowing history. Two sub-topics were discussed under the last two topics.

Briefly stated, it was noted that knowledge of history contributes to one's liberal education: The education of a free

citizern. Cognitive dimensions of history include understanding and learning skills of the discipline of history. Finally, it was observed that history has pragmatic value in helping the historically informed understood trends and benefit from the broader human experience.

Three illustrations of misunderstandings or incorrect assumptions that have appeared in adult education literature were used to illustrate certain problems associated with historical ignorance. Three other examples were also used to illustrate how historical research contributes to a better understanding of adult education. In addition, three examples of current concerns that would benefit from historical analysis are included.

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